DARK HUNGER

STORY AND ARTWORK BY
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It was a cold, calm morning in early December. There was a soft silence in the air, only disturbed by the occasional chirping of one of the few birds that remained during the frigid winter. A thin layer of snow was covering the city, glistening brightly as the sun began to peek over the horizon. You could ask almost anyone, and they would describe the atmosphere as nothing other than peaceful.

Halie, however, was in full defiance of the seasonal mood.

She bustled around her kitchen, a whirlwind of pots, pans, and pastries as she prepped for the day ahead, fueled by a soft warmth resonating within her chest. Her culinary finals were just weeks away.

Finals required baking.

Baking required practice.

And practice required feedback.

The feedback was Halie's favorite part of the cycle. It helped her refine and improve her skills, perform better on her finals… but that wasn't *really* the reason.

The reason was who she got the feedback *from*.

Natalie McDowell had become Halie's increasingly reliable go-to taste-tester, and also happened to be the reason for that warmth inside her on this particular morning.

Nat was breathtakingly pretty, incredibly kind, and- much to the pleasure of Halie's deeper interests- extremely fat. The little baker was afraid to admit it, but she had fallen head-over-heels for her girthy friend, and the lustful part of her mind rarely wanted more than to feed her everything she made.

To watch her grow even fatter off of her baking.

Much to Halie's continuing surprise and pleasure, Nat was happy to help with her assignments whenever asked, despite how it impacted her figure- and today was no exception. While pulling a tray of sugar cookies from the oven, Halie's thoughts wandered to the afternoon ahead. It would be her and Nat, together in her apartment, Nat eating her fill of the food she had lovingly prepared just for… practice, of course.

She stood there, the cookies' sweet aroma surrounding her like a warm blanket, picturing Nat's soft chubby fingers lifting the sugar-packed treats to her round face. Her already large belly expanded further and further, and-

-BZZT-

Halie jumped, snapped out of her daydream by the phone vibrating in her pocket.. She placed the cookies on the stovetop and pulled out her phone to check who had messaged her.

Nat's name appeared on her screen. Halie's heart soared, but quickly took an unexpected plummet.

"Hey Halie, I'm really sorry, but I won't be able to come by later today. I woke up this morning feeling like death, I think I caught the flu going around :(. Sorry this is so last minute…"

Halie stared at her phone, a cold numbness smothering the heat she'd had roaring in her chest all morning. After what could have been several seconds or several minutes, she gathered herself and typed out a reply.

"Aw, it's ok! It's not your fault!" Halie typed shakily, fighting desperately to stave off the jittery cold which seemed to seep from her heart to her fingertips. "Please just focus on getting better, I'm sure the practice will be enough prep for the final!"

She didn't have to wait long before another message appeared.

"Wait, you made things already!? Shit! I'm REALLY sorry! I hope it doesn't go to waste!"

Halie didn't know how to reply.

A spike of anxiety punctured through her heartache. There was more at stake than spending time with Nat, this was also about her test prep. Was there anybody else she could ask for help?

Her best friend Sammy was strained between her own finals and work. She most likely wouldn't want to help anyway, if she could help it.

Her classmates were in the same boat she was.

Her family lived too far away.

Maybe…

As if reading Halie's mind, another message appeared from Nat.

"Actually, if you still need someone, I could always ask-"

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-THUMP-THUMP-THUMP-

The heavy knocks echoed through the apartment. Halie clapped her flour-dusted hands, took a sharp breath through her nose, and made her way to the front door. She grabbed the doorknob, paused a moment to brace herself for who was on the other side, and opened.

"Hi, Chloe…"

The light from the hallway was eclipsed by a bulky figure, looming over Halie as the latter felt her pulse quicken. She was a sight to behold, being not only a good deal taller, but also somehow substantially fatter than the already enormous Nat. Her fluffy coat only added to her immensity, an outfit that made her look like if the Michelin Man let himself go.

"Hey Halie," Chloe replied curtly, stepping into the apartment. Both of her hips brushed the doorframe as she passed through, and Halie had to sidestep to avoid being bumped. The wooden floor creaked loudly beneath her every step as she lumbered purposefully into the middle of the small room.

Despite how her guest's imposing form dominated the space, Halie's mind struggled to believe that she was actually there. Several hours had passed and still, she was surprised Chloe had even agreed to come.

Although honestly, it shouldn't have been surprising at all, considering free food was on the line, Halie thought.

"Hot in here," Chloe said with a huff, tugging at the fluffy collar around her thick neck. "So, what's on the menu?"

"Huh?"

Halie hadn't been listening.

Chloe planted her pudgy hands on her vastly wide hips.

"What did you bake? That's what I'm here for, right?" She paused, lifting her head slightly and sniffing the air. "Ohhh, is that apple pie?"

"O-oh, sorry! Yeah, that's in the oven right now… I also made some cream puffs and sugar cookies…"

"Hmmm…" Chloe hummed as her eyes glazed over in deep thought. A moment of silence followed, only broken as Chloe began absent-mindedly unzipping her jacket.

"Th-thanks for coming, by the way… with Nat being sick, I kind of expected to be on my own."

"What about Sammy? What's she up to?"

"Oh, um… she's too busy studying this weekend…"

"Ah, makes sense. Probably best for her, that girl needs to cut back some."

Halie could have laughed, but she didn't dare. Despite the fact that Sammy had packed on more than her fair share of weight in recent years, she was probably still only half of Chloe's monumental bulk. But that was the thing about Chloe; she never seemed to fully grasp the irony of those kinds of statements.

"Anyway, it's no big deal. You culinary students made some great stuff at the Halloween party. I'm not gonna turn down a personal invite," Chloe said as she finished removing her coat.

Halie's eyes widened. The coat had made Chloe appear extra fluffy, but ironically, it had also concealed her true girth beneath.

Chloe had gained more weight since the last time Halie had seen her. It wasn't much, but the change was instantly apparent to her discerning eye, made more obvious thanks to the sleeveless white turtleneck that clung to her every roll.

Unable to look away, Halie's mind began to soak up more details.

The fabric of Chloe's top stretched across her gigantic, protruding gut like a field of bright white snow. Her eyes drifted down the expansive curve, which came to an abrupt end at her navel where it met the straining waistband of her high-waisted jeans. The denim clung so tight to the lower dome of her belly and around her barrel thighs it

looked practically painted on. Finally, her eyes flicked upward to take in Chloe's arms, their soft, flush, pink flesh on full display thanks to the sleeveless top. They were probably the only parts of Chloe's body that were smaller than Nat's, though Halie couldn't help but think it wouldn't be a far stretch to say they were as large around as her own waist.

"So, where should I put this?" Chloe asked, giving a small gesture with the coat clutched in her outstretched hands.

Like coming out of a trance, Halie's eyes snapped to the coat. "O-oh, I'll take it for you."

Halie took the coat, but paused. Holding it in front of herself, she was suddenly starkly aware of how enormous the garment in her hands was compared to her tiny frame.

She noticed Chloe had gone quiet as well. Looking up, she caught a pair of slightly widened eyes staring back down at her.

Chloe noticed her gaze, and quickly turned towards the living room entrance. "I can just sit wherever, right?"

"S-sure! I'll be with you soon. Go ahead and get comfortable."

Chloe waddled quickly out of sight, the groans of protest from the floor getting quieter as she entered the other room. Halie sighed as she hung Chloe's coat in her closet.

This is so awkward… Halie thought to herself as she moved to the kitchen to begin preparing a tray of baked goods. A sinking feeling washed over her as she lamented the course of the day's events. Her mind drifted to Nat, sick and alone in her and Chloe's shared apartment. She took several of the cookies, wrapped them in foil, and placed them in the corner as a small care package for her crush. It wouldn't make up for the lost time, but it helped lift her spirits somewhat.

As she returned her attention to preparing the tray, her thoughts returned to Chloe. Sure they'd hung out in the past, but it was more through their connections to

Nat and Sammy. The two of them had never really had a conversation, and truth be told, Halie wasn't even sure what they'd talk about. They never seemed to get along particularly well, and Halie, sheepish as she was, even found Chloe kind of intimidating.

So why did you invite her?! Halie's mind spat. She didn't really have a good answer. She just picked up the tray, stacked with cream puffs and sugar cookies, and made her way to the living room where Chloe was waiting.

Chloe was standing on the other side of the room in front of a shelf containing a small collection of DVDs and blu-rays.

"Oh, um, is there something you'd like to watch?"

Chloe reached forward and plucked one of the cases off the shelf, gesturing it towards Halie. "How about 'Dark Hunger'?"

Halie blinked. *The fantasy series?* she thought to herself. Aloud though, she replied, "Oh, um… have you heard of it before?" It really didn't seem like something Chloe would seek out, and Halie was sure she had picked it at random.

"Yeah, I've read all eight books. I'm interested in how the show handled things, but I couldn't be bothered to spend $15 a month for one show." Chloe waddled back across the room to Halie, trading the DVD case for the tray of treats.

Halie looked down at the cover, featuring the title in bold silver letters and an image of a man and woman clad in medieval armor with a monstrous silhouette behind them.

"You read them?"

"Yep. It's one of my favorite book series. Been into them since I was in high school." She dropped into the couch, which whined loudly in protest.

"I-I'm a bit surprised," Halie said without thinking.

Chloe raised an eyebrow as she plucked a cream puff off the tray and lifted it to her mouth. "Why? I read all the time. I've read tons of stuff," she huffed, taking a large

bit out of the pastry. Then, in a voice as filled with pleasure as her mouth with fried dough and cream, she said, “Mmph… this is really good…”

Halie felt her face burn slightly at the almost sensual way the words dripped from Chloe’s packed mouth. Without a word, she turned away and walked across the room to her blu-ray player. She slipped in the disk and grabbed the remote, but upon turning around, froze.

Chloe had already finished the first cream puff and was starting on a second. Halie stared in awe, suddenly unsure whether to sit or stay standing.

Chloe noticed the stare, and a faint pink blush spread across her fat, stuffed cheeks. She chewed, swallowed, and said “Uh, *ahem!* So are you going to, like, ask me questions or something? Write down my thoughts?”

Halie practically jumped, a feeling of embarrassment rushing through her. “Sorry!” she said a bit too loudly, moving to a chair beside the sofa and dropping onto it. She took a few moments to put on ‘Dark Hunger’, then grabbed a small notebook from her coffee table. Pen and paper at the ready, Halie sat prepared as Chloe began to ramble off some early thoughts about the cream puffs.

But Halie did not write.

She wasn’t even sure if she heard.

Her focus was fixed on Chloe, who between words was still shoving more food into her mouth with the voracity of someone who hadn’t had a morsel in days. Cream puff after cream puff slid past her greedy lips and down into her giant gut, straining harder and harder against her constricting clothing.

Halie’s mind screamed at her to look away. To focus on her notes. To act *normal.* But something was bubbling to the surface inside her. Something molten hot and intoxicating. It wasn’t the kind of fuzzy, warm, loving heat she felt around Nat. No, as she watched Chloe devour the tray before her, with an unhinged fervor that she had never seen from anyone else in her entire life, what Halie felt was a primal sense of lust.

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“...and thus, a dark force spread across the land. A force that inflicted no outright malice, but brought something out of the people touched by its intoxicating tendrils. A dark hunger.”

The opening narration echoed through the kitchen as Halie slipped on her oven mitts. The timer had gone off moments before, giving her an excuse to step away to the kitchen and collect her thoughts.

Good fucking lord, I forgot how that girl eats! She thought, her breathing fast and shallow. The heat of the oven blasted her face as she opened the door, flooding the room with a cinnamon-rich aroma. She pulled the pie out with shaking hands. The crust was a perfect shade of golden brown, the scent thick enough to taste.

Halie’s mouth watered.

But it wasn’t for the pie.

Halie set the pie down on the counter with a clumsy thud, hands trembling like she was suffering a fever. She leaned over, gripping the counter, forehead prickling with sweat.

Pull it together, she ordered herself. *You’re practicing for finals, not-*

Her thoughts were cut short by a strained groaning noise from the other room. Halie was sure Chloe was shifting her weight on the couch, and pictured her leaning forward, pawing at the diminishing tray of pastries, filling herself with endless calories.

She felt a strong compulsion to rush back to the room and watch.

A small voice, different from before, took the opportunity to speak up from deep in the recesses of her mind. *It wouldn’t hurt to enjoy this, right?*

Halie considered that thought. Chloe hadn't been her ideal choice, obviously not. But she was what Halie had. And if she was all she had, Halie reasoned, she might as well make the most out of her.

It was like a lion had been released from its cage. Halie jumped into action, scanning around her kitchen, desperately looking across the unused ingredients strewn about the counters. *This is all I had planned for, but I've got to make more!*

She left the pie on the stovetop and spun to grab a mixing bowl, getting to work on a batch of chocolate chip cookies. *They're her favorite,* Halie remembered. *She'll demolish these in minutes… I could even make a double batch…*

Working with the swiftness and confidence that only years of experience could bring, she tossed the ingredients into the bowl and began mixing. She was about to add the chocolate chips when she heard Chloe call for her from the other room.

She poked her head through the living room doorway. "What's u-" she trailed off when she saw the empty tray sitting in front of Chloe. It had only been a few minutes, but the pile of sweets was gone.

One look at Chloe proved that they didn't simply disappear. A thick ring of stomach flesh was visible where her sweater had ridden up past the waistband of her high-waisted jeans, made more apparent as she leaned back against the strained couch's cushions. She seemed oblivious to it however, her eyes flickering between the tv before her and the phone she held on her lap-tray of a gut.

Halie's thighs unconsciously clenched together.

Chloe noticed her return and looked up at her. "I'm finished with this. What's up next? Was that timer for the pie?" She asked the questions with an almost giddy wanting in her voice.

"Oh, yeah! Give me a second, I'll bring it right in!" Halie squeaked, her voice coming out embarrassingly high-pitched. Her head disappeared back into the kitchen as she ran to grab the warm apple treat. Clutching the pan a little too tightly, she began heading back to the living room when another thought crossed her mind.

“Do you want some whipped cream or ice cream with the pie?”

There was a brief moment of silence.

“Both!”

Halie’s knees practically buckled.

“O-oh… coming right up!”

With some effort she gathered herself, put the requested toppings on the tray, and made her way back to the living room.

“You gonna be spending all day in there?” Chloe asked as Halie placed the decadent arrangement on the table in front of her.

“Oh, well um, I’ve still got some baking to finish. I-I thought today was a bust so I didn’t prepare as much as I normally would have.”

“Oh, alright,” Chloe replied as she leaned forward and cut somewhere between a quarter and a third out of the pie.

Oh my God, Halie thought as Chloe slapped the thick wedge onto her plate, before topping it off with a large sloppy scoop of ice cream and shaking the can of whipped cream.

Chloe’s sausage-like finger pressed on the nozzle, and Halie counted every second it held down. Seven and a half seconds may not feel like a long time, but to her, it felt like watching actual mountains form as creamy peaks completely covered the hot crust and melting dairy.

Halie stood stiffly, rooted to the spot, arms wrapped around herself as if to hold her body together.

Chloe raised her fork and slid it deep into the heap of cream and pie. The flakey crust split apart easily, and the amber filling oozed out, mixing with the ice cream that dripped over it. She lifted the loaded fork to her lips, opened wide, and shoved it into her greedy mouth.

Her eyes fluttered closed, and a moan slipped out.

Quiet. Guttural. Raw.

Halie bit the inside of her cheek. She clutched her arms tighter, nails digging crescents into her skin. After a moment however, she remembered her mission.

She returned to the kitchen, finished preparing the cookies, and put them into the oven before practically running back to the living room, sweating and panting lightly.

“Ok, the cookies are baking.”

Chloe looked up at her, mouth stuffed with pastry, and scoffed. “You look like you just walked up a flight of stairs.”

Halie squirmed uncomfortably. “I tried to be quick so I could take more notes.”

More like “watch”, a voice in her head corrected.

Chloe swallowed the mouthful of pie. “Is it a good idea to rush?” she asked. “I mean, you’re the pro here, but I’d think you should want to take your time a bit, yeah?”

“Oh, uh, well, we have to be fast for exams, so it’s kind of like… its own practice!” Halie improvised.

“Ah, alright,” Chloe said as she stuck her fork back into her decadent dessert.

Time seemed to fly by as Halie watched Chloe demolish the pie. She held the notebook in her lap, but still wrote no notes.

The pie disappeared swiftly with each mountainous forkful, Chloe's belly heaving with every bite and breath, stretching tighter and rounder by the minute. The room was heavy with the sweet scent of sugar and the soft, incessant sounds of Chloe eating.

Halie, meanwhile, was in complete bliss. It was like a show performed specifically for her, which she admittedly had a large hand in producing. She was just thinking it couldn’t get much better than this, but as Chloe finished her second slice- leaving noticeably less than half of the pie remaining- something completely unexpected happened.

As the final bite of her second slice passed between her lips, a low sigh escaped her. She shifted slightly, pushing her butt forward to settle deeper into the seat, and slowly moved her hands down towards her middle. She slipped her hands beneath the muffin top that had formed as her belly pressed hard against her waistband, searched blindly around the front until she found the strained button, and released it.

As if waiting to be freed, her belly surged forth, pushing the zipper down all on its own and crashing down on her lap with a loud, heavy-

-SLAP-

The noise echoed in Halie's ears, matching the thundering of her heartbeat.

Chloe's belly wasn't just huge, it was *immense.* Halie couldn't comprehend how the mountain of fat that now covered so much of her lap had ever fit in those jeans in the first place. It was amazing how much of her there was. It was incomprehensible how much she was still expanding.. It was-

"Hey, what're you staring at?"

Halie felt as if she'd been struck by lightning. She ripped her gaze from Chloe's belly to her face, and was met with the sight of blushed cheeks and a furrowed brow.

"If you're gonna expect me to keep doing this for you, you've gotta let me make some more room."

Halie's mouth was dry, her throat tight. "Sorry…" She managed to let out softly.

"It's whatever," Chloe said, dropping the subject so hard Halie wondered if she intentionally was trying to divert it from her midsection. Whatever the reason though, Halie was thankful for the shift.

Without another word, Chloe leaned forward, her doughy midsection spreading near completely over her thighs. Halie watched her remove what remained of the pie from its tin, dollop a huge scoop of ice cream onto it, and top it with another spiraling tower of whipped cream.

“Um… by the way, I wasn’t expecting you to eat the whole thing or anything…” Halie said, knowing full well that a part of her was lying.

Chloe just leaned back, jammed her fork into the calorie casserole on her plate, and turned her eyes back to the television where “Dark Hunger” was now beginning its third episode.

“Why not? Don’t you want a full report?” she asked as she lifted the fork to her mouth.

“Oh, uh… sure?” Halie replied, unsure of the reasoning but appreciating the outcome.

“Besides, my doctor said I need to try eating more fruit.”

Halie didn’t know what to say to that. Fortunately, at that moment, the kitchen timer went off again, saving her from the extremely awkward conversation. She practically leapt to her feet.

“Oh, there’s the chocolate chip cookies!”

She rushed across the room and back to the kitchen. As she went, she was sure she heard Chloe’s stomach let out a wanting groan, and her pace quickened.

*Nat can eat. Nat can eat **A LOT**.* She thought, moving to the oven. *She’s also sweet, kind, adorable… I…**LOVE** her…* She pulled out the tray of steaming cookies and placed them on the cooling rack, momentarily indulging in the warm happiness thoughts of Nat always provided. *But… dear god, this girl!* She continued, taking a deep, ragged breath, and mindlessly biting down on her bottom lip until it hurt. *She doesn’t stop! She’s pure, concentrated sex appeal!*

Halie started frantically rummaging through drawers, looking through cooking ingredients for anything that could spark an idea of what to bake next. Her head was overflowing with images of Chloe shoving an endless stream of treats into her fat face, fueling her obsessed search.

Within a minute, the countertops were loaded with anything Halie could get her hands on. She quickly assessed the stock, and before getting caught up in baking again, she took the cookies from the rack to deliver them to the bottomless pit waiting in the other room.

I have to see how far I can take this!

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“Can’t you see what’s happening? The Hunger has you! Look at what you’re doing, you’re out of control! Get a hold of yourself!”

The words coming from the television rang throughout the apartment, but Halie didn’t hear them. She was too absorbed in the show playing out live in her living room.

Sugar cookies.

Cream puffs.

An entire damn pie.

Chloe had devoured them all.

It was so much, but to Halie, it still somehow felt like so little. She was frantic, running back and forth from kitchen to living room, baking, serving, watching, all while Chloe kept eating.

Chocolate chip cookies.

Banana bread.

Lemon tart.

All made in a blind rush by Halie, only to be gone moments later in the rounding gut of the greedy glutton sprawled on her couch.

She didn't want it to end.

She wouldn't *let it.*

That was the idea, anyway. But as Halie returned to the kitchen after watching Chloe shove half of the lemon tart into her mouth at once, she was hit with a harsh realization.

I'm out of food!

She paced the kitchen, eyes scanning over the enormous mess of empty bowls and pans. *But… she's still eating! I need more… somehow…*

The solution was there, but it took several moments for Halie's overheated brain to latch on to it. Her hand shot down into her pocket, pulling out her phone and trembling slightly as she unlocked the screen.

I'll order something, she thought as she began walking back to the other room. *It doesn't REALLY matter if I made it at this point, right? If I just-*

She stopped.

She lifted her head.

Chloe hadn't noticed her. She was still on the couch—slouched low, legs parted wide to cradle the weight spilling over her lap. But she wasn't eating anymore.

Her breathing was slow. Labored. Each inhale lifting the vast dome of her exposed stomach, each exhale a hiss through clenched teeth. Her cheeks were flushed, a bright pink deeper than her hair.

Her hand was lightly massaging the red blush that burned on the top of her now fully-exposed stomach. It moved in slow, circular motions, occasionally causing Chloe to softly wince at the touch.

Halie stood there and watched her, heart in her throat. The girl before her no longer looked gluttonous or smug, but overwhelmed and uncomfortable.

Guilt bubbled up from beneath her lust.

She'd done this. She'd watched and pushed while Chloe stuffed herself senseless. She'd served her all of this food, telling her it was all for her schoolwork.

She hadn't taken a single damn note.

Halie's fingers hovered over her phone screen, the delivery app openly mocking her. She pressed the lock button, and tucked it into her pocket.

That's enough, she thought. *She's had enough.*

"So, did you enjoy the tart?"

Chloe practically jumped out of her skin. Halie thought her sofa was going to split in two when she crashed back onto it.

"Shit, you scared me!" She wheezed, scrambling for the tv remote and pausing on a particularly unflattering shot of Dark Hunger's main character. "You're like a damn mouse sometimes…"

And you're big as an elephant… Halie thought to herself, the feeling of guilt growing inside her. But she said aloud, "Sorry. It looks like you're almost done?"

"Yeah," she said, looking like her usual self again and picking up the remaining lemon tart to take another bite. "Just got this left. So, what's next?"

Chloe's sudden return to her usual demeanor left Halie momentarily stunned, but she quickly composed herself.

"Actually, that's it"

For a moment, she thought she saw a flash of relief on Chloe's face.

"You sure?" Chloe asked. "I ate light this morning, so I've got some room if there's more."

I doubt both of those things, Halie thought, reaching down to the coffee table and grabbing her little notepad. "Don't worry, you gave plenty of feedback-" she trailed off slightly, noticing the little crappy doodles of an almost spherical cartoon Chloe on a page devoid of notes. She felt her face burn, and she shut it quickly.

Chloe, who couldn't see the notepad, snorted. "Yeah, I'm sure you were writing a lot of notes from the kitchen." She pulled out her phone and made a couple of swift clicks. A moment later, Halie felt her phone buzz in her pocket. "There, I wrote down some of my thoughts myself, just in case."

Halie blinked. She felt like she was beginning to understand. "T-thanks, Chloe."

"You're lucky I didn't have anything else going on today, huh?" Chloe said with a husky chuckle. She looked back at her phone. "Well, it's probably time for me to get going. The bus will be coming by soon."

"Oh, I'll go grab your coat," Halie said, and made her way to the closet. Behind her however, she could hear a creak, a grunt, and then a much louder creak. A moment of silence, and then it repeated. Against her will, Halie felt her pulse quicken again. She thought she knew what was happening, and when she returned, she was immediately proven right.

Chloe was rocking forward, trying to build momentum before failing and falling back into the couch. She let out an exhausted sigh, her forehead glistening with sweat.

"N-need a hand?" Halie asked tentatively.

"I can stand up on my own!... I just need a sec to figure out this couch of yours. It's like a sand trap!"

Halie watched as Chloe made several more attempts. Just when she was certain she'd need to step in, Chloe made one final lurch forward, and managed to roll her giant

center of gravity off the couch and over her slightly shaking legs. She stood up to her full height and threw her head back, out of breath but triumphant. Her bloated middle expanded even more with each belabored wheeze.

Holy fuck she's fat, Halie thought as she watched Chloe try to calm her labored breathing. Then she remembered the jacket, and handed it out to Chloe, who took it without a word and swung it behind her back. She got it on, but upon attempting to close it, the two halves didn't even come close. They were kept apart by the giant, stretched expanse that was Chloe's sweets-stuffed midsection.

Holy fuck she's SO fat! Halie's mind screamed as she watched her struggle and fail repeatedly to zip her giant coat. However, when she noticed a slight blush spread across Chloe's cheeks, the guilt returned again.

"H-hey, let me give you a ride home, alright? It's the least I can do. Way better than the packed afternoon bus."

"Oh, that'd be awesome, thanks," Chloe said, a less concealed look of relief spreading across her round features. "I'm sick of getting stared at by creepy dudes."

"Just give me a second to get ready," Halie said, pulling apart the knot behind her back and moving to the kitchen again. She hung her apron in her closet, grabbed her own coat, and turned to leave when something caught her eye.

It was the small ball of tinfoil, holding the cookies she'd kept for Nat.

She picked them off the counter and looked at them.

She'd torn her whole kitchen apart, trying to prepare whatever she could for Chloe. Gave her everything in the apartment.

But without even realizing it, she hadn't thought for a moment to give her this.

Halie smiled, put the cookies into her coat pocket, and went back to join Chloe.

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-Creak-

Calm down, Halie.

Chloe wedged herself against the passenger door, placing one hand on the roof and the other on the seat to brace herself.

“Hunh… huff… Fuck…”

Just keep your eyes forward.

Twisting her torso, gut sliding against the door, Chloe maneuvered her butt closer to the seat. She shuffled her feet, gritted her teeth, and lunged.

-WHUMP-

The car rocked violently. Halie got thrown to the side so abruptly she thought she’d get whiplash, if not for her seatbelt.

Chloe had managed, after over a minute of effort, to get her full bulk into the passenger seat, and was now giving Halie’s suspension a workout like it had never seen. Halie couldn’t help but notice, now that the car had stopped swaying, that she was still sitting at an angle towards Chloe’s end of the small vehicle.

She put the car into drive, doing her best to push that thought from her mind.

They drove in silence for a while, the only noise being Chloe’s exhausted breathing.

Halie didn’t know what to say to her. She still felt guilty, like she'd taken advantage of her. She glanced over at Chloe out of the corner of her eye.

Now that the thrill has worn off, things are just awkward again…

Halie was sure the whole ride would go by like this, when suddenly, Chloe spoke.

“So, I have some thoughts about the show so far.”

Halie was surprised. “O-oh yeah?”

“Yeah so, it’s a pretty good adaptation overall. But they RUINED Alexander. They made him sound like he was supposed to be so handsome in the books…”

This wasn’t what Halie had expected at all, and she felt caught completely off-guard by the sudden conversation. Still, she found herself wanting to engage with the discussion.

“Right? I don’t understand the casting choice at all. It pretty much ruins his character arc for the first two books.”

Chloe was silent for a moment, and Halie realized she had an almost disappointed look on her face.

“...I just wanted him to be hot…”

Halie couldn’t help herself. She burst out into laughter, and said “Wait, really? That’s why?”

“Hey! The character stuff matters too!” Chloe’s face was turning scarlet. “But I had a crush on him when I read the first book… At least with Beth, they really nailed-”

Chloe continued on, making grand gestures with her hands as she described her feelings to Halie. The two went back and forth, ranting and laughing as they continued towards Nat and Chloe’s apartment.

Huh, this is… nice, Halie thought as Chloe once again bemoaned the lack of attraction she felt to the character of Alexander.

Before they knew it, they were pulling into the apartment complex parking lot. As the car approached the dropoff lane by the front door, Halie changed the subject of the conversation.

“Thanks again, Chloe. You were a really big, uh… You really helped me out today.”

“That’s good,” Chloe said, smiling.

Halie felt the guilt well back up inside of her. “Sorry if it was… too much…” she said softly. She felt dirty for doing what she’d done to Chloe. Like a creep for feeling the way she did about it.

“Not at all. Everyone’s gotta have their cheat days, right?” Chloe said reassuringly. “It’s not the first. Just gotta be good the rest of the time!”

Halie looked at her, and felt her heart unclench slightly.

As she relaxed, she remembered the cookies in her pocket. “Oh, uh… by the way… can you give these to Nat?” she asked, holding them out to Chloe.

Chloe looked at the small package, her nostrils flaring at the smell coming from under the foil. Halie realized that the girl beside her might have been the worst choice of a food messenger in all of human history, and started to regret asking her.

“I’m sure these ones were baked with extra love, huh?” Chloe said with a loud snicker.

Halie sat there, feeling a sense of foreboding wash over her. “Wait, what do you mean?”

Chloe raised an eyebrow at her. “I mean, you LIKE her, don’t you?”

The anxiety exploded inside Halie. “Wha-huh? The heck do you mean by that?”

Chloe grinned, and her eyebrows perked up slightly. “Yep, thought so.”

“...is it that obvious?”

“You blush like a damn tomato every time you’re within thirty feet of her, so yeah.”

Halie paused. “So… does she…?”

Chloe let out a loud, piggish snort that caused her whole body, as well as the whole car, to jostle slightly. “Are you kidding? Nat’s so oblivious to this stuff, anything short of shouting ‘I LOVE YOU’ would just bounce right off her.”

Halie sat in silence.

“Don’t worry,” Chloe continued. “I’m not gonna say anything to her, it’s not my business.” She gestured with the cookies, adding, “And I’ll make sure she gets these”

“Oh, uh, thanks…”

“But,” Chloe said, pausing slightly before continuing on, “If you ever wanna talk about it… I’m open to coming by again. Could also watch the rest of the show. Just make sure you prepped enough beforehand so we can actually watch it together.”

Halie felt a pang of guilt at that, but brushed it off. “Thanks, Chloe,” she said with a smile.

For the first time since she’d known her, Chloe gave Halie a genuine smile. “See ya, Halie! Best of luck on your finals, if I don’t see you!” And with that she opened the door, swung herself out of the car swollen gut first, and waddled off slowly to the front doors.

Halie watched after her, still amazed at how incredibly fat Chloe was. Amazed at how much she could eat in one afternoon.

But most of all, she was amazed to find that over the course of the day, she came to see Chloe as a real friend.